

# OUTWARD BOUND

*by*  
Christopher Morley



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THE TUSITALA — OUTWARD BOUND

*Photograph by Christopher Morley*



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*Sailed Yesterday: ship Tusitala, Rio Janerio*

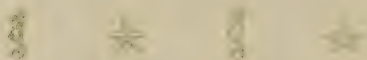
*—Ship-news item, August 10, 1923*



E HAD seen her under every circumstance of humiliation and disorder.

We had seen her as she was the morning, ten weeks ago, she towed in to the Morse yard at Brooklyn. Dumb, dubious, despondent, she was plainly wondering what would happen next. We had seen her standing high in dry-dock; had seen her in the mess and clutter of trailing gear; had seen her foul with coal-dust under the tips at Com-

munipaw. Now, for the first time, was a chance to see her on her own terms.



She lay at anchor off Stapleton.

Loaded down to her marks, and seen in a decent perspective, with green open water about her, it was really possible to esteem the true beauty of her white hull, the tall rake of the masts. Her hatches were battened down; on deck was lashed a great sixty-foot timber to serve as jury rig in case of emergency. This, one felt, was the full and final touch of reality. Though an old seafaring man who was making final inspection of her had one other criterion. He looked approvingly on the gasoline winch, the new Gould pump, the patent log, and even on the Oxford Press prayer-book which the skip-

per had particularly asked for as a parting gift from the Three Hours for Lunch Club. But our expert was not satisfied until he saw the grindstone forward among the anchor gear under the focsle head. "Never go to sea without a grindstone," he said.

Cap't Coalfleet, accompanied by the Sandy Hook Pilot, returned from the Brazilian Consulate aboard tug *Federal Number 1*, which was to tow her out to sea. Those devotees who were to see the last of her got aboard the tug. There was no chanteying at the capstan, which was turned not by man power but by a cable from the winch. Slowly the chain came up. The attitude of Mr. Mikkelson, the mate, as he leaned far over the cat-head watching the chain rise link by link, was as good as a poem. A happy man,



we suspected, was Mr. Mikkelson. He had stood by her in the long days when she was idle and empty at Hampton Roads, destined [it seemed] to be sold and broken up. And here she was, in cargo again, reclassified 100-A1 at Lloyd's, and hoisting her destination signal from the halliards on the mizzen. Gently, very gently, *Federal Number 1* began to bear on the towing hawser. The "Black Shape" or anchorage signal came down from the forestay. She moved forward and was under way. Her name signal was hoisted for the watchers at Quarantine, MFCR, a bright string of blue, red, white and yellow, under the half-masted ensign for President Harding. We remembered that one friendly correspondent had suggested as an expansion of that anagram *My Friends Chose Romance*.



It's a long tow out through the Narrows, the lower bay [bending southward through the old channel, as towing is not allowed in the Ambrose groove,] past the Hook and clear beyond the Ambrose light vessel. At the end of the hawser she came stately along, the airy triangles of her rigging daintily pencilled on pale air. It was a perfection day: surely no horizon was ever more clear, sharp as an etcher's line against the sky.

Great ships came past her, down the channel: the *Finland* and the *Conte Verde*, running almost neck and neck towards open space; the *Hansa*, once [we believe] the famous *Deutschland*. [Which reminds us that coming past the Brooklyn docks in the tug we saw a ship with the astound-

ing name *The Lambs*. We were told it was so named by a Shipping Board mandarin who had been jovially entertained at that high-spirited club, and during the meal promised to name a vessel after it.] A swift power-boat *Polly*, came tearing after us; ran under *Tusitala's* stern and sped alongside for a while, evidently curious to know what was this sudden coming to life of an old sea-print. For indeed she looked rather like something that had come to life from the picture-hung walls of India House.

So she proceeded, slowly slipping across the wide bay above Sandy Hook. The buoys, like tips of red rockets, peeped out of the green water. Now that her white hull was down to the Plimsoll mark the amazing tallness of her build was apparetn; one was glad that there



were 2,400 tons of coal aboard to steady that nearly 40,000 square feet of canvas. And as the swells came rolling in past the Hook we noticed the jibs bundled at the tip of the bowsprit begin to flutter. She lifted and leaned a little. The whole spider pattern of her cordage [there are some 24,000 feet of running rigging, apart from stays and shrouds] seemed to tremble. The blocks, silhouetted against the falling light, which was abaft her, were like fat flies caught in a web, a web cunningly devised of gossamer triangles and trapezoids.



She passed the Hook. Suddenly there were tiny figures running aloft, in black outline against the bright afternoon. The jib shook out and bellied plumply;



then the lower topsails. Her forefoot rose slightly; with an almost imperceptible gesture she seemed to curtsy to her old friend and enemy the sea. Who could doubt her alive? Like some great lady, proud, yet not too proud, she made just obeisance to the world she understood. Not quite sure of herself yet in her new name and her new clothes, and yet suddenly and strangely feeling the old manners and etiquette coming back to mind. She rose gracefully over a long low slope of the swell. Was that the way? Why, yes, that was it exactly. And she shook out her upper topsails.

By the time the pilot boat was reached, and two brawny fellows took the pilot off in their rowboat, she had on her full suit. Faint as the breeze was, she was under her own way; the towing hawser

had little to do. But in such light air, the skipper was cautious. The tug did not cast off until well beyond Ambrose lightship.



With the prostrate sun full behind her, she overhauled us, rippling steadily. In our ignorance, we had not known anything could be so beautiful. In that level flush of light she was daintily gilded alow and aloft. She moved like a dream. A phrase of Conrad's — that we can never exactly recall, but it moves vaguely in our mind — came to utterance. "Ships, the most beautiful work of men's hands and the object of their care." She was only a little creature, after all, in that vast cave of sunset light and setting out on such unreasonable spaces. And we knew that



however one may sentimentalize the beauty of sailing ships, it is not an easy life that they lead.

The tug gave her a long salute. She dipped her ensign and moved nobly past. On such occasions there is only one phrase possible; a phrase that is a theology in itself. Good luck! She moved away, her high comeliness gradually melting into new shapes as the perspective altered. Barely enough breeze to keep her canvass drawing, she was long in sight, like a tall tower far at sea.





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